



# Almost An Ally, But Not Quite: Intersectionality and Insistence in Forster's *A Passage To India*

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**Abstract**— In this paper I seek to analyse the events in *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster to argue that it is impossible for a coloniser to develop a genuine friendship with his/her colonised counterpart. Using postcolonial theory, and particularly Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'mimicry,' this paper demonstrates why the desperate attempt by the colonised to become friends with the coloniser fails. This is an effort to discover an answer to the question that the author poses in his novel. The author poses the query in one of the first chapters of the book. In this paper, I analyse the hypothesis that colonised people frequently strive to imitate the values and customs of their oppressors in an attempt to be seen as their actual allies, but fail miserably. This will be analysed by looking into the various points of intersectionality that are present throughout Forster's novel.

**Keywords**— Alterity, Assertion, Mimicry, Other and Superiority.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Theorists and writers of postcolonial literature explore what happens when two societies collide and one of them, aided by propaganda, empowers and considers itself superior to the other. As a disciplinary advancement, postcolonialism aims to examine the fabricated personalities of colonised cultures and to test their fundamental issues. *A Passage to India* gives a number of representatives of the behaviour of the British who have ruled India for a long time and points to the British idea of preference and abuse of colonisers. There are numerous examples of social differences and energetic partitions, and these distinctions hinder the formation of relationships between colonisers and colonised.

After two separate visits to India in 1912 and 1924, Forster published *A Passage to India* in 1924. Throughout the course of his travels in India, Forster met many Indians, including Syed Masood, who later became his close friend. The relationship between Dr Aziz and Mr Fielding, the English schoolmaster, is used by Forster to depict their relationship. As a result, Forster gained a small understanding of both sides while maintaining a

multifaceted relationship and gaining entirely new knowledge and feelings. In light of this story, the reader quickly empathises with the oppressed race, treated impolitely and inhumanely by the English rulers. The reader of this novel attempts to find an answer to whether an Englishman (coloniser) and an Indian can be friends. This question appears in one of the book's first chapters, but the reader is left to figure out the answer.

## II. ANALYSIS

The colonised people are divided into two groups in Forster's *A Passage to India* - Indians who have been 'westernised' and Indians from the lower society. From the lower strata, there are some unknown natives. The presentation of these Indians is from the perspective of the English colonists in the novel. Their colonising counterparts are neglected and suppressed. They think this is their 'destiny'. This viewpoint of colonialism held by E. M. Forster is quite comparable to Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological effects of colonialism. Fanon was absolutely mesmerised by the psychological toll that colonialism had, not just on those who conducted the

colonising but also on those who were colonised. He asserted that the oppressed and afflicted natives' souls had been harmed by colonialism, which was the fundamental cause of the issue. The continual portrayal of the native by the colonial master as a non-human, animalized "thing" is what obliterates the native's identity as a distinct people group.

To summarise Fanon's knowledge of the psychological impacts of colonialism, the following might be said: When colonial powers portray the native people of a region as backward, barbaric, and unsophisticated, the natives of that region eventually come to accept the veracity of the colonial powers' racialized and prejudiced view of their people as fact. As a direct result of this, the native will eventually come to view himself as being sinful, barbaric, and fundamentalist in nature. According to Fanon, the indigenous person does not perceive themselves to be a man at all, which leads them to equate the word "man" with "white man." When it comes to issues of culture, the native person takes this commonly held belief to the point where they believe that the only values that matter are those held by white people (Fanon 157).

In *A Passage to India*, we have natives such as Dr Aziz, a standard westernised Indian. He cannot be easily identified as an Indian from the description of the novel. Dr Aziz is very much an epitome of a product as envisioned by Macaulay in his Minutes – “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 49). His demeanour and attitude reflects Homi K. Bhabha's idea of 'mimicry'. According to Bhabha, the indigenous person is "Anglicized" as a result of the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised: 'He is a mimic who can now insinuate himself into the colonial structure, respond in English and adopt the structure of logic and reasoning in argument which western education has taught him.' (Bhabha, quoted in 'Of Mimicry and Man').

However, this semi-English native will never be entirely white – 'almost the same, but not quite', to define him (Aziz in the novel) in Bhabha's words. Aziz, an Indian Muslim doctor working at the Government Hospital, is reaching out to Mrs. Moore, Adela Quested, and Cyril Fielding in an effort to form friendships with them. After some time has passed, Adela makes a slanderous accusation against Aziz, stating that he attempted to rape her while they were exploring the Marabar Caves. Nevertheless, the accusations are dropped following Adela's evidence at the trial.

Dr Aziz and Professor Godbole are discovered two years later in Mau, a town several hundred miles west of the

Marabar Hills that is currently commemorating Lord Krishna's birth. Dr Aziz discovers Fielding and his wife are coming to Mau for company. Fielding had given him a letter describing all the aspects of his wedding to Stella Moore, the daughter of Mrs Moor. Fielding had given him a letter describing all the aspects of his wedding to Stella Moore, the daughter of Mrs Moor. Aziz, on the other hand, never read it.

When they meet, all misunderstandings are cleared up, but Aziz doesn't care who Fielding marries; his heart is now with his own people, and he doesn't want any Englishman or Englishwoman to be his friends. Fielding and his wife borrowed a boat later that day to witness the religious procession. Aziz assists them, thus repeating the gesture of hospitality he intended to render during his two-year visit to the Marabar Caves. The two vessels clash in the middle of the ceremony, and everyone is thrown into the sea. The accident puts an end to any animosity between Fielding and Aziz. A few days later, they're going on a trip in the jungles, and Aziz gives Fielding a letter from Miss Quested in which he thanked her for her 'fine conduct' two years ago. They discuss politics, and Aziz predicts that India will be free of British rule one day and that they will be friends in the true sense of the word. Now, he is completely disillusioned. Despite his best attempts, Dr Aziz failed to be recognised as a real friend of his colonising masters. In the words of Bhabha:

The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double-vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object. (Bhabha 129)

The epiphany that Aziz had towards the end of the book serves as a portent for the development of a 'national culture.' According to Fanon, there are three levels that constitute the framework of a national culture. In the first place, the indigenous intellectual is subject to the dominance of the colonizer's culture, and he or she makes an effort to copy and assimilate the culture of the coloniser by forsaking their own. As a direct consequence of this, the native strives to attain the level of "whiteness" that is attainable. At the second stage, the indigenous person realises that he will never be truly white or "white" enough for the colonial master to view him on an equal footing with other subjects of the colony. The native intellectual has travelled back to his birthplace in order to conduct research on his family's history; it's possible that he would even romanticise the traditions of his ancestors. In this stage, Fanon suggests, there is no significant engagement with the native cultures and that there is instead a

celebratory tone. As the indigenous intellectual achieves the third stage of their development, they have reached the point where they are completely anti-colonial. He joins the ranks of his people and engages in the struggle against imperial control. This is then followed by an in-depth analysis of his own cultural traditions.

An examination of this kind seeks to do away with those facets of indigenous culture that appear antiquated or even repressive, with the end goal of paving the way for a new future following the end of colonialism. Aziz eventually hits this point at the end of the book. His enraged retort, as stated in the novel's final pages, makes it clear that a colonised person can never be friends with a colonial person until they are both fully decolonized. He direly feels the need for a 'Motherland' – "India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Muslim and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! Hurrah! Hurrah!" (Forster 312)

Mrs Moore and Adela should get to know India. They are totally oblivious to the existence of the 'old Eastern country'. Since the novel depicts Indian culture and colonisers' activities from the colonisers' perspective, it is not impartial and has a tendency for separation. There is clearly a rift between the imperial power and the subject races, as well as a lack of contact. The English colonisers are unable to continue their journey through Indian society. In many ways, *The Bridge Party* confirms Rudyard Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West" as a clever parody on the endeavour to bring East and West together and examine the possibilities of friendship between the coloniser and the colonised:

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great judgement seat;" ('The Ballad of East and West,' 1-2)

Said captures the fundamental thinking behind colonialism and imperialism in *Culture and Imperialism*: "They are not like us, and for that reason deserve to be ruled". The colonised were transformed into the Other, the "Not me." Colonial governments allow colonisers and colonised natives to see their relationship as mutually beneficial. But once the colonisers obtain political influence, they will become exploiters. Aziz wonders aloud whether it is justifiable that an Englishman is a teacher when qualified Indians are readily available. There is no way for Fielding to give the right answer. His silence gives legitimacy to the racist and sexist act and lends credence to the colonial ideology articulated in Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden":

"Take up the White man's burden --

Send forth the best ye breed --

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives' need;

To wait in heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild --

Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half devil and half child." ("The White Man's Burden," 1-8)

In the background of the novel, it seems that Fielding was taken up by the White Officers'

Responsibility to educate the 'savage' Indians. Also, as if he's asking a counter-question to

Aziz's query, "How may we put it down?"

Forster, in the entire novel, investigates the barriers to interracial friendship within the colonial context. He reveals the reason for this animosity between the two of them in the last few pages of the novel, and through the mouth of Aziz, he cunningly declares that this hostility can only be erased by the departure of the colonisers: "Down with the English anyhow. That's certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you the most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it is fifty-five hundred years, we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then" (Forster 312). He ends this conversation with Fielding by saying, "and then... you and I shall be friends" (312).

### III. CONCLUSION

The writing in *A Passage to India* is of an exceptionally high calibre. The novel provides readers with an insightful look into the inner workings of the British Empire through its portrayal of the British Raj in India in a manner that is both emotive and consistent. The dilemma of whether colonised Indians and coloniser English can be allies is brought up at the beginning and again at the end of the story. The climax appears to provide an answer that is in the negative. Because of the abrasive demeanour of the latter, it is impossible for the two to have a warm and cordial connection with one another. Even a well-educated colonised person like Mr Aziz, who is an Indian in the story, is unable to create a cordial relationship with his British counterpart. This is due to the fact that he is never, ever successful in his endeavours, both conscious and unconscious, to please them. Despite Dr Aziz's best efforts, his so-called "friends" consistently disregard and dismiss him on the basis of a variety of intersecting identities.

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